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EDITOR'S NOTE

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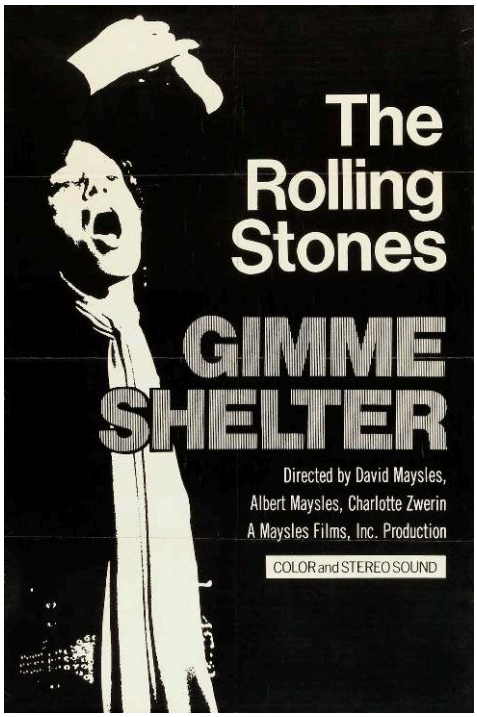
1 **THE GENESIS FOR THIS PROJECT** occurred late on a summer evening in the last part of the last century, during a massive summer rainstorm that drenched an Ohio-area concert bowl during a stop on a tour called Lollapalooza. As thunder and lightning battered the concert-goers and the band Soundgarden churned up an equally riotous noise, the crowd took to wrenching the metal folding chairs that were bolted to the earth and hurling them like sleds down the hillside which the venue occupied. Before long, the lawn area had become a mudslide down which audience members were travelling on their stomachs, landing in a heap of flesh and hair at the bottom, tangled up like giant snakes. When the concert came to its premature end, Chris Cornell, the lead singer of the band, surveyed the bespattered scene. 'You guys look like somebody's army out there'. he said ruefully. 'The question is, whose army are you going to be?' (Arnold 1993: 202).[1]



2 That was in 1992. Since then, it has become clear that those kids were nobody's army. As a group, the 18–34-year-old white males that made up a large part of that crowd and others much like it have floated through the ensuing decades, more like a gaseous emanation than a cohesive demographic force. This chapter, excerpted from a larger work, interrogates the genesis of the powerlessness and lack of direction that rock crowds represent. While concert-goers at Lollapalooza and other large festivals invariably define themselves as rebellious, countercultural and liberal, they are in fact largely docile, passive and conservative. I argue here that this misperception stems in part from earlier misperceptions formed through specific discursive rhetorics and constructions circulated in the film documentaries about Woodstock and Altamont.

3 I am focusing here on the documentaries for several reasons. First, as a former rock critic, I know how different individual perceptions of concerts can be from media consensus. More importantly, though both concerts have been written about and analysed at length, the films have been examined less frequently, particularly in tandem. Finally, while those concerts may have much to tell us about the counterculture, music, performance, spectacle and the 1960s, their legacy and role in shaping the ideology of the rock festival *qua* rock festival has been left largely unexamined. For example, Simon Frith's foundational essay '"The Magic That Can Set You Free": The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community' (1981) discusses how rock falsely sees itself as creating community, but does not focus on festivals *per se* as sites of cultural production. Andy Bennett's excellent book of collected essays *Remembering Woodstock* (2004) adds many insights to important aspects of the festival. Memory, representation, nostalgia, aesthetics and the popular are all discussed, but most of the chapters concentrate on the festival itself, not on the film (the exception is

Bennett's own chapter, which addresses the film and nostalgia). Braunstein and Doyle's collection *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* (2002), as is the case with a number of other books on countercultural history, refers to Woodstock in a larger context, but is not primarily about music or music audiences. Finally, Dale Bell's collection of essays on the making of the Woodstock film, *Woodstock: An Inside Look at the Movie That Shook Up the World and Defined a Generation* (1999) adds insight into the actual making of the film, but never steps outside that vantage point to observe how the film affected ideology.

4 By contrast, my work takes a broader view of Woodstock's role as a purveyor of ideology. In it, I suggest how such historic rock festivals worked ideologically to legitimate the highly contradictory beliefs and actions of rock fans at present day concerts. From a contemporary standpoint, Woodstock and other free (or quasi-free) festivals of the late 1960s and early 1970s are often seen as the most visible flowerings of the term 'counterculture'. They were countercultural in the sense that, as Bennett describes it in this volume, they were 'a means of articulating aspects of counter-hegemonic ideology, practice and belief' (Bennett, 2014: 17) Although there is little doubt that Woodstock et al. were countercultural in the sense that they at least superficially challenged the norms of dominant, mainstream culture, this chapter questions whether such festivals were in fact ever counter-hegemonic. I suggest instead that many aspects of them and especially of their mediations – specifically the massively popular films *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace and Music* and *Gimme Shelter* – were the opposite, working to reinforce hegemonic values of democracy, capitalism and the utility of a free market. Today, rock festival attendance is very much part of a supercultural experience, and I argue that the seeds of reappropriation were tucked into their genesis and displayed via their filmed depictions. In his introduction to this volume, Bennett suggests that in recent years 'counterculture' has become a less historically contingent term, one that refers less to ways of furthering social change or identity formation, and more towards a range of lifestyle choices made between people with similar sensibilities. Here, I locate that shift in the discourse to much earlier in history.

5 This misunderstanding between countercultural and counter-hegemonic behaviour may be tied to early notions of freeness, as opposed to freedom; that is, the idea that music should be delivered for free. This concept has regained currency today in debates about peer-to-peer file sharing. But the notion was always based on a misconception: Woodstock was not intended as a free festival, though it became one (as did a number of other festivals, including the Isle of Wight Festival of 1970). Altamont, on the other hand, was intended to be free, but may not have initially been intended to be a festival, following more in the tradition of the free Rolling Stones concert in Hyde Park in July of 1969 that served as a memorial for founding member Brian Jones.[2]

6 What it clearly *was* intended to be was a film, thus creating a doubly confusing narrative. Indeed, Woodstock, Altamont, the Isle of Wight Festival and the Hyde Park concert all could serve as a sort of matrix of festival-type shows from which today's more codified version of a rock festival has emerged. Woodstock itself was the outgrowth of a series of free festivals in northern California, as well as a history of non-classical (mostly country, folk and bluegrass) outdoor music festivals in the US stretching back to the early twentieth century (of these, the annual Newport Folk Festival is the best known). In the early 1960s there were also a series of inexpensive

festivals preceding Woodstock, especially in California, including the vastly influential but much smaller-scale Monterey Pop. Tickets to this festival cost from $3 to $6, and the arena held 6,000. In the UK, there were the Beaulieu Jazz festivals (1956–61), which were significant to the origins of pop festival culture in Britain (see D. Laing and G. McKay in Bennett 2004: 4–5 and 91–107).

7 Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to taxonomise the history of free festivals and concerts, the motives driving the promotion of each are especially important when considering events held in the 1960s. The obvious motive is profit – which, in the 1960s, was considered crass or worse. It is the great unspoken evil, and no wonder: even today a festival or concert which is provided at no cost has a measure of power over its audience that fee-driven concerts do not. For that reason alone, the 1960s abounded with free festivals, especially in northern California, but Woodstock was the largest and most mediated, thanks to the success of the documentary account of it and its soundtrack, *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace and Music*. It holds iconic standing as a historical moment. Gustave Le Bon famously called the twentieth century 'the era of crowds', stating further that 'the power of the crowd is the only force that nothing menaces and of which the prestige is continually on the increase' (1897: xv). Woodstock proved once and for all that Le Bon was right.

8 Since Woodstock, rock crowds have been formed and joined by literally hundreds of millions of people. Every summer they gather in fields across the planet.[3] But unlike other types of crowds, such as protest crowds, football crowds or famine crowds, they do not evoke a sense of fear or danger. The rock crowd, however large, is largely considered a benign gathering, eagerly joined by young and old alike.

This newfound twenty-first-century trust in the crowd – and the sense that the crowd is peaceful, righteousness and essentially passive – can be traced through its depiction on film, specifically in the documentaries *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace and Music* (Wadleigh 1970) and *Gimme Shelter* (Maysles Brothers 1971). It is a depiction that may have little to do with the actual experience or meaning of attending Woodstock or Altamont, but a lot to do with how a young person today attends Roskilde, Glastonbury, Rock in Rio or Bonnaroo.

9 Since 1969, there have been thousands of rock festivals similar in nature to Woodstock all over the world, many of them gathering together hundreds of thousands of people. But appearances to the contrary, this doesn't mean that these rock festivals have provided coherent and decisive communities. As Simon Frith has written, although rock music, like folk before it, articulates communal values, the idea of a cohesive rock community springing out of it is a myth:

> Sociologically, rock's account of community has always been unsatisfactory. Reference is usually made (in Belz's book, for example), to the 'community of youth' but as youth is described only in terms of musical taste, the resulting concept of community is vacuous – we are left only with windy phrases like 'the Woodstock Generation.' This is not, in fact, how the myth of community works in popular music. The music (whether rock or pop or folk) is not made *by* a community, but provides certain sorts of community *experience*. (Frith 1981: 164)

As he points out, what is important about a rock festival isn't any of the music or messages one receives there, the importance is *participation*.

10 This is why in one sense, the rock festival provides a powerful mimetic force able to replicate cultural memes, although I would argue that despite the false consciousness surrounding it, it does so only in order to (as Debord noted, above) 'incite people to

excessive spending'. What I want to suggest here is that the power to replicate cultural memes originates not in the concept of the rock festival itself, or in any individual experience of it, but in the way that certain cultural rhetorics about festivals were circulated via two specific films, *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter*. My analysis of these films shows how they were able to translate a chaotic and multi-dimensional event into a particularly appealing fairy tale.

11 Today, Woodstock is generally portrayed as a spontaneous emanation of, as the title of Barbara Ehrenreich's 2007 book on rituals, dancing and the counterculture would have it, 'collective joy'. But this is the first of the misconceptions around Woodstock et al., since spontaneity is not really a hallmark of festivals, rock or otherwise. In actuality, rock festivals take years to organise and are in fact highly administrated events. In this way, if not necessarily in others, rock festivals are inevitably outgrowths of the culture industries. Supporting this claim, in his critical essay 'Culture and Administration', Theodor Adorno questioned the idea of spontaneous mass behaviour, calling such actions a part of the 'administrated' nature of modern life. Music festivals in particular, he said, were like 'a gypsy wagon ... roll[ing] about secretly in an enormous hall, a fact which they do not themselves notice' (1991: 118).

12 And yet, the festival has always been an administrated event, in ancient Greece and Rome as well as in medieval times. Indeed, the most direct precursors to the rock festival were surely the fairs and carnivals that were a major feature of pre-capitalist life. Fernand Braudel's historiography, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, not only describes these festivities but provides a useful framework for how to interpret the meaning of such celebrations economically, that is, outside the confines of mere religious rituals. Braudel describes how these early fiestas allowed ordinary citizens to participate in revelry in ways that gave them not just a religious jolt, but also a ringside view of the emerging market economy. As he writes, 'As the proverb rightly said, "Coming home from the fair is not the same as coming home from the market"' (Braudel and Reynolds 1982: 245).

13 In the same vein, coming home from the rock festival is not the same as coming home from the record store. Particularly in the age of mechanical reproduction, going to a rock festival is not primarily a way of hearing music, but a portal through which middle-class Americans are able to experience the same three attributes that made medieval fairs so appealing (and which allowed for the hegemonic stranglehold of the Doges): in Braudel's words, 'entertainment, escapism, and worldliness' (ibid.: 245). Worldliness is a particularly apt word to describe participation in a rock festival experience, for Woodstock and its precursors were the province of the informed, the educated, the politically minded and the liberal elite. Moreover, participating in them is not cost-free, even when the entrance fee is waived, but requires access to transportation and equipment. Finally, although festivals often champion rurality and nature, participants are drawn to festivals in places which enhance their cosmopolitan credentials.[4]

14 Despite early historical parallels, however, the modern rock festival is in many ways a unique form of gathering, and its crowds differ from those who gathered in Saint-Germain, Bayreuth or Sensa. The most obvious difference is technological. Amplification changed the way that gatherings like these could be experienced, by increasing the centrality of music as a focal point, and decreasing the sense of the individual as a reveller. Other technological innovations, like those that transformed

mass media and allowed news and images of festivals like Woodstock to be transmitted to the masses, have had more lasting effects, as audiences are incited to gather through reports seen on television, heard on radio or experienced in the movie theatre. Walter Benjamin's famous ideas on the concept of aura apply forcefully to attendance at the rock festival, for it is the festival's presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be (1968: 220) that gives it value over other ways of experiencing music.

15 That value resides not only in the music, but in the less tangible notion of participation. In most observable ways, the rock festival crowd is racially and politically homogenous, socially conservative and wedded to mainstream musical aesthetics. The only thing that differentiates them from fair-goers is that rock festival constituents believe themselves to be at odds with societal norms. Unlike medieval crowds, who went to the fair as part of a normative social ritual, members of rock crowds see going to the festival as a way to make themselves social transgressors. Moreover, since their association with the anti-war movement in the mid-1960s, rock crowds are usually depicted in the press and in the public sphere as liberal, emancipatory, resistant and political in nature, even when these are traits that the festivals do not explicitly claim for themselves. This emancipatory element, however imaginary, is clearly one of the rock festival's biggest selling points, and accounts in part for its longevity as a cultural form.

16 One reason that large rock festivals were able to successfully configure themselves as discursive sites of social and political discourse to their audiences is because they are begotten from a historical genesis – the 1960s – that is even more fraught with conflict than public memory invests them. The anti-war movement, Civil Rights Movement, and the conflict known as the generation gap are all aspects of the era that rock festivals purport to speak about. However, some of the conflicts inscribed in these festivals are not of the struggles for which we'd like to remember them. Indeed one of the things my work reveals is that while such concerts – both past and present – frequently represent themselves as sites of hegemonic struggle and resistance, they also work as ideological state apparatuses, inscribing conventional values in their attendees. This shouldn't be surprising when one notes that these festivals invariably (if largely unconsciously) catered to a white, middle-class elite.

17 The misconception that Woodstock was a site of resistance surely arose not at the festival itself but through its film. *Woodstock* consolidated the public consensus that Woodstock was (as the film is subtitled) *3 Days of Peace and Music*. The glow was so strong that even direct evidence to the contrary – such as a disastrous festival on the Isle of Wight in 1970 – did nothing to diminish the future popularity of such festivals, which have only grown in popularity ever since. The early 1970s were particularly rife with Woodstock-styled festivals, especially in England, as Glastonbury Fayre and the three Isle of Wight festivals attest.[5] Indeed, the final Isle of Wight Festival drew an astonishing 600,000 people, or 0.1 per cent of the population of Britain at the time (although the Isle of Wight Festival had been in the works for several years, the enormity of its success that year may in part be a testament to the excitement generated around the film, which was shown for the first time in Europe at the Cannes Film Festival in June of 1970). The film *Message to Love* (Lerner 1996), which documents that festival, ends with the promoter, Ron Foulk, saying, 'this will be the last event of its kind'. Foulk is completely off base.[6]

Woodstock

18 *Woodstock*'s importance as a nonfiction film, as a vision and as a marketing tool for rock cannot be overstated: it is the mainstay of the rock business's sense of cultural relevance and its supreme self-confidence in its market. Joe Boyd, then manager of a band called the Incredible String Band, categorically believes that if his band had played in front of the cameras in the rain on Friday night, they'd have become the stars that Melanie – who took the Incredible String Band's time slot and is a central figure in the movie – became: they opted to take a later slot, weren't filmed, and flopped. 'We knew we had blown it', Boyd writes in his memoir *White Bicycles*. 'The extent of the error became clear in the months to come as the Woodstock film reached every small town in America and the double album soared to the top of the charts' (Boyd 2007: 223).

19 One reason that Woodstock's vision had such impact was simply that the film was the most popular documentary of its era. Richard Barsam called *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace and Music* 'a lavish, lyrical poem to the green and grassy splendours of a pastoral event' (1973: 288). It is, Barsam also notes, 'a subjective record – a traditional non-fiction film', which, he claims, has much in common with Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (about the 1936 Olympics). Barsam means this as a compliment: he characterises *Woodstock* as 'a newsreel of a documentary event'. But this is a naïve assessment of how films are assembled. In *Woodstock: An Inside Look at the Movie That Shook Up the World and Defined a Generation* (Bell 1999), various producers of the final product describe how they assembled the film with limited financial resources, film stock, cameras or man power, in addition to logistical problems, rain and sonic difficulties such that sound had to be overlaid or used diegetically.

20 This description of how the film *Woodstock* was made clearly points to a creative process of assemblage, rather than to what Barsam was pleased to call a 'newsreel'. But I'd argue that *Woodstock* goes even farther in adding a narrative and even an ideology to the event in question. In fact, it owes its success to its canny use of Hollywood tropes, to its anointing itself with the weighty title of historical document, and to the way it flatters its audience, who are told over and over again that *they* are stars of the event.

21 Simply put, Woodstock's director Michael Wadleigh has crafted much more than a record of a concert here, as can be seen by the ever-widening effects that it has had on popular culture. First, it has long served as a redemptive vision for a counterculture which might otherwise have to think badly of itself. Second, it has helped to popularise a number of bands and styles of music that might otherwise have had rather short cultural stays. And finally, it has inspired almost a half century's worth of similarly organised rock festivals, drawing the youth of three continents into their experience. In addition, *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace and Music* allowed its promoter, Michael Lang, to recoup his losses. Prior to its release, Lang had lost an estimated million plus dollars, but the film earned $13.3 million in wide release, and much more in its repertoire after life, as well as in its recorded form as a soundtrack album.[7] By 1979, it had earned $50 million (Bell 1999: 10).

22 Woodstock's most important function, however, was discursive. Far more than the film *Monterey Pop* (which came out a full year earlier and was a considerably shorter film) *Woodstock* cast a spell on those who saw it – a spell that caused them to long to go to rock festivals. Prior to its release as a film, the days-long rock festival was a curiosity,

attended only by a moderately well-off urban elite cadre of young people hooked into the media and the moment. After the release of the film, potential festival-goers began to include members of other social classes eager to experience Woodstock's notion of 'collective joy', with or without its political and social implications. By 1975, the rock festival was no longer tied to a particular political movement or collectivity, but merely served as a smorgasbord of pop for consumers to experience cheaply.[8]

23 To do all that, it stands to reason that the film of Woodstock was really much more than just the visual record of a concert. It is a *Bildungsroman*, with the festival itself standing in as young Werther. In other words, it is the festival, rather than the festival-goer, that will grow and change and find itself, as the film wends its way to its finish. But this is not the only way in which the film frames itself as a novel of discovery. Many of its images are directly linked to fictional devices, particularly the appreciation and worship of nature and the way that nature is linked in every frame to a teleological view of American history.

24 Consider, for example, the first 25 minutes of the film, which are devoted to shots of the pristine empty green fields of Max Yasgur's farm in upstate New York. These shots are full of shimmering distant lakes and amber waves of grain. The camera lingers on the fields, only gradually depicting a slow invasion by handsome, shirtless young men on horses and tractors. It is as if western expansion occurs right before our eyes. A brief scene of these young men communally erecting the stage, lifting its framework high over their heads, is highly suggestive of barn building or roof-raising: the entire scene implies that what is being built is not a stage, but a church, underscoring the sense of Manifest Destiny. Hence, rather than hippies, the men in these scenes appear to be something with more gravitas: Quakers, or pioneers, creating a foundation for America. The men in these scenes are depicted as movie star handsome, strong and rugged, while the women in these shots (and in the film as a whole) are invariably shown as domestically contained vessels, fulfilling conventional female roles. In one brief shot, a beautiful young woman rides behind a craggy, bearded frontiersman on a horse. In another, a heavily pregnant woman tends children.

25 Presently, the scene shifts to the arrival of the 300,000 concert-goers who will fill the fields over the course of the weekend. The pace of the scene implies that Wadleigh is reimagining them as settlers, repopulating a continent – although such a vision paints an unusually benign view of the coming of Europeans to the New World. Here, no Native Americans are driven cruelly off their land, no slave labour is used to cultivate or build, and no questions of ownership mar the pristine landscape. Instead, they arrive on foot, riding bicycles and motorcycles, on horseback, via helicopter, and by car. They come as pilgrims – the word used later by *Time* magazine to describe the scene – to set up camp in ways that, as pictured by the film, are natural, communal and friendly.

26 Interestingly, an enormous amount of this footage is presented in split screen, a technique that will be much copied in rock films which then 'quote' Woodstock. Bennett says that the split screen effect has two purposes, to intercut between the artists and the audiences, thus giving both equal weight, and 'to provide extra visual commentary on points and observations made by those interviewed in the film' (2004: 48). I would add that the technique also calls attention to Woodstock's duality. On the one hand, the concert is spoken of as an organic, beautiful celebration of nature – of 'going back to the garden', as the film's theme song put it (the song, 'Woodstock', by Joni Mitchell, was recorded a month after the concert. It is sung here by Crosby, Stills

and Nash, and then overlaid on the scenes of arrival, the first and most egregious instance of how non-diegetic sound is used here). On the other hand, the split-screen emphasises that the concert is a highly technical and technically mediated event. In addition to the split screen, which in itself highlights technology over nature, the film shows this mediation explicitly via complicated aerial shots which capture the traffic jams, through shots of the stage and of the amplifier towers, and through many film-within-film scenes of the media interviewing people on the site. These reflexive moments allow the audience to see the concert as newsworthy and historic. But at the same time, the film's clever split screen gimmickry and its use of non-diegetic music serve to distance the film-makers from mainstream media.

27 Another duality that is often brought to the fore in the movie is the one between 'the squares' and the 'freaks' – that is, the townspeople and the hippies, the *artistes* and the *bourgeoisie*. Again and again the film calls attention to the two 'nations' that are merging here at Woodstock, as when townspeople praise the hippies and the hippies behave nicely back. This is another fictional cliché from the western genre: the stranger comes to town; at first he is looked at askance, until finally he is accepted and his difference assimilated into the culture (see *Shane*, *Stagecoach*, *True Grit*, and so on). Over and over again, duality is on display, both of the conventional and the unconventional, and of technology and nature, as when a shot of the moon is paired with a shot of the klieg lights, or when a shot of the vast crowd as seen from a helicopter is paired with the close-up of the face of an individual. The scenes appear to be dominated by the memory of Richard Brautigan's notion of a 'cybernetic meadow' from the poem 'All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace' (Brautigan 1968).

28 Woodstock reaches its climax during memorable concert performances by artists like the Who, Santana and Jimi Hendrix. But throughout it continues to purvey themes of duality, difference and tolerance. The split screen continues to emphasise the size of the crowd and the duality of that size with individual moments: for a movie of a concert, there are few live shots and quite a bit of the music was re-recorded. The weather comes in for a lot of air time, as does female nudity. Most of the performers play second fiddle to these shots: much of the music is used as background music for shots of concert-goers swimming, smoking, sleeping, talking dancing or doing yoga. The first performer, Richie Havens, is given an enormous amount of screen time, and at the end of his set says, 'This concert is about you ... tomorrow people will be reading about you tomorrow all over the world.' This is the first sense that the audience gets that it, itself, is the star of the show, that they have been invited into this space to perform as a rock crowd. It is an invitation they will continue to accept for the next 40 years.

29 Yet another important visual argument which *Woodstock* (and to some extent *Gimme Shelter*) makes to viewers can be detected in its depiction of geographical space. In addition to addressing the more normative 'back to the land' narrative which the counterculture was highly invested in at the time (see Turner 2006), *Woodstock*'s images of crowds in nature may well have addressed and even assuaged the public's growing fear of overpopulation. The idea of a population explosion was very much in the *Zeitgeist* at the time, thanks in part to Paul Ehrlich's enormously influential book *The Population Bomb* (1968). *Woodstock* calms these fears by showing a crowded world where everyone is still having a good time; a world where resources are shared and nature (in the form of the rain storm which drenches the crowd on Saturday night) is benign. The

aerial shots of upstate New York (and, in *Gimme Shelter*, rural Livermore) also assure viewers that the land is not under siege: over and over again we are visually reassured that it is endless, pristine and there for the taking, once again evoking the epic American ideal (or idyll) of the west. Hence, the scenes of crowds are invariably overlaid with a sense of happiness, mellowness and joy to reassure viewers that overpopulation and its attendant problems are nothing more than a myth.

30 The most important assurance that Woodstock gives, however, is of America as a united nation. This is most evident in the final and most canonical scene in the film (a scene recreated in Ang Lee's 2009 film *Taking Woodstock*). In it, an older, white, male sanitary worker, clearly standing in for conservative blue-collar America, is interviewed about the concert. 'I have two sons, one here and one in Vietnam', he says. It is a comment which is explicitly meant to unite the two sides of debate – the counterculture and its opposition. That it worked is attested to by the wild success of the film, its longevity as a cultural referent, and the hundreds of recreations that take place every summer.

Gimme Shelter

31 The film *Woodstock* opened one year after the festival, in 1970, and was immediately embraced by the public. The film *Gimme Shelter*, which chronicles another free concert of 1969, did not receive nearly as much love. As Barsam has pointed out, *Gimme Shelter* is *Woodstock*'s Manichean rival, both in popularity and in spirit. 'The two films', he writes, 'represent polarities, not only in the festivals themselves and their significance to the so-called counterculture, but also in the approaches the film makers take to them' (1973: 287). *Woodstock* relied on filmmaking gimmickry and an underlying narrative point of view, while *Gimme Shelter* is a triumph of *cinéma verité* filmmaking. *Woodstock* both assumes and uses news documentary techniques, while *Gimme Shelter* attempted to 'live' the film: at the concert's height, the filmmakers deployed 35 camera people in the field (one of whom was a very young George Lucas) to capture crowd moments.

32 On the surface, *Gimme Shelter* is the yang to *Woodstock*'s yin, an unblinking depiction of the dark side of crowd gatherings, the concert that ended the Age of Aquarius and which ushered in the tainted 1970s. In fact, a close reading of *Gimme Shelter* shows that it uses similar rhetorical strategies to make a similar point to that of *Woodstock*. Both would have it that rock's effect on a crowd is so soul-shaking and spell-binding that it overrides any danger or violence. Both reinforce the idea that attending rock concerts is a form of taking part in history. Both films valorise the idea of being part of a rock crowd, but *Gimme Shelter* goes further. Sheila Whiteley has argued that the Stones' role at Altamont brings up 'the question of the relationship between performer/audience, the performance, and the musical text itself', adding that 'the unmitigated violence at Altamont suggests that for many the songs were interpreted as inciting brutality, that they provided a model for behavioural patterns' (1997b: 84–5). While most agree that the reason for the violence at Altamont – which began well before the Stones took the stage – had more to do with the hiring of Hells Angels as security, few would argue that the menacing subject matter and sound of songs like 'Sympathy for the Devil' and 'Midnight Rambler' would, as Whiteley puts it, 'hardly calm the already explosive atmosphere' (ibid.: 84).

33 *Gimme Shelter* opens with a shot of Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts sitting on a donkey. He is wearing a top hat and is draped in a cape, and he is brandishing a rifle. The absurdity of this image – taken for the cover of the Stones' 1970 live album *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out* – is well in keeping with the film's overall themes of chaos, crowds and culpability: indeed, filmmaker Albert Maysles has stated that the image is reminiscent of the opening scenes of *A Tale of Two Cities* which are intended to portend the coming French Revolution (in fact, the eventual image that was used is inspired by a Bob Dylan song, 'Visions of Johanna', which reads in part, 'jewels and binoculars hang from the head of a mule').

34 Like *Woodstock*, *Gimme Shelter* has a paradox at its core: it wants to be the conventional concert documentary about the Stones' 1969 tour that the Maysles Brothers were originally hired to produce. Thus, for the first half of the film, we see the Stones performing at Madison Square Garden to rapt (and peaceful) masses – ecstatic crowds upon whom lead singer Mick Jagger literally showers rose petals. Later, we see the band recording at Muscle Shoals recording studio in Alabama, and the camera lingers on them lovingly, depicting them as zonked on their own talent. Finally, we see them back stage, behaving like rock stars, but by this time, the power of the earlier scenes has made us complicit in this vision of them as bohemian *artistes*. Thus, the horrifying end to *Gimme Shelter* is mitigated by our sense that the band is above reproach.

35 About half way through the film, the mood darkens as we begin to see scenes of live performances intercut with scenes of people attempting to set up the free concert which will later be dubbed Altamont. The arrangements for this concert – which first has to be moved 34 miles north from Golden Gate Park in San Francisco to Sears Point Raceway in Sonoma and finally 56 miles east to the Altamont Speedway, in a part of unincorporated Livermore now known as the Altamont Pass – are portrayed as embattled, chaotic and possibly not even in the band's best interest. In these scenes, they are surrounded by lawyers and the media, and there is a lot of incomprehensible shouting. The chaotic nature of these interludes serves to heighten the viewer's sense that this movie is an unbiased document, that is, a real piece of *cinéma verité*, with no directorial intervention.

36 But that's nonsense, of course. The Maysles Brothers, like other proponents of the contemporary direct cinema movement (notably the directors/auteurs D.A. Pennebaker, Ricky Leacock and Robert Drew) were adept at creating moods, which becomes more sombre in this case, with the Altamont footage.[9] To begin, in a sequence that echoes *Woodstock*, we see people setting up stages, arriving at dawn and partying.[10] Gradually, however, the images of peaceful attendees degenerate: there are a lot of clearly drug-induced freak-outs, many naked people and other ugly images. Eventually, we see the murder. Intercut throughout this footage, we are sent back to a studio where the filmmakers David and Albert Maysles are observed showing the footage of the murder to the Stones themselves. An inordinate amount of time is spent watching the Stones' faces as they are confronted with the film's 'truth'. In this way, the film evades condemning the Stones: by allowing us to see them confronting the crime itself as it happens, there is a sense of expiation.

37 *Gimme Shelter* has gone down in history as a dark film about a murder. But in the end, as Whiteley suggests, what is upheld by the entire film is the Stones' *mystique*. Whereas *Woodstock* argued that there, power is vested in crowds, *Gimme Shelter* argues that the power in these events lies with the rock stars. Although it prides itself on its

objectivity, the Maysles Brothers film is clearly sympathetic to this vision of the Stones and follows a similar line of reasoning. The movie neither condemns nor praises the Stones or the violence it depicts at Altamont. Instead, it presents the Rolling Stones as atavistic romantic heroes from another age, and then exculpates them. The final image – of the Stones performing (indoors) in Maryland – leaves one thinking not, 'Gee I'm glad I skipped Altamont', but 'If only I had been there'! As with Woodstock, to have attended was to have become worldly. It was to have participated in the world.

38 The Maysles Brothers' film, though vilified at the time, has ultimately made for a compelling viewing experience. But it can't be called historical truth. Instead, despite the stated precepts of direct cinema and in the same spirit as *Woodstock*, *Gimme Shelter* takes familiar narratives from Hollywood and fiction – in this case, the myth where the powerful piper pipes the children down the canyon to their death – subjectively depicts it, and then dubs it historical documentary. By so doing, *Gimme Shelter* argues that despite the violence at its core, attending festivals like Altamont is a crucial way of participating in the history of the era. To have been there is to have been an actual actor in the scene: it is to have taken part in the shaping of a cultural moment of great importance – the 'revolution' alluded to in the image at the start of the film. *Gimme Shelter* portrays the horrors of Altamont starkly.

39 This, then, explains the film's genius: that nothing about its portrayal of Altamont has prevented generations of rock fans from going to equally dangerous and chaotic scenes. Despite the different modalities of the two films (one dark, one light) there is a core of similarity between *Gimme Shelter* and *Woodstock*. Perhaps this accounts for the odd fact that critics have compared both films to the work of Leni Riefenstahl, generally considered to be the finest producer of twentieth-century political propaganda. That, despite the clearly shown downside of each event – the rain, the loss of money, the murder – thousands of similarly-styled festivals have been crafted, attended and succeeded in their wake is another strong case for their lasting power as generational touchstones.

Conclusion

40 The fact that the Woodstock experience is entirely imaginary is perhaps not that surprising. A more problematic absence in the discourse surrounding it is discussion of the fact Woodstock's audience was almost universally white. African Americans are relegated to the role of performers, specifically Richie Havens, Sly Stone and Jimi Hendrix, whose otherness is made explicit, particularly in the case of Hendrix as he performs a mesmeric and transformative version of the *Star Spangled Banner*, complete with sounds of gunfire, evoking protest of the Vietnam War. Meanwhile, the camera's male gaze roams freely over the fields, picking out naked women from the crowd. This gesture is clearly meant to enhance the discourse of free love which *Woodstock* works hard to uphold, and which has always represented one of its main appeals to mainstream audiences. These two tropes – free love, and the African American as transgressor and dangerous disturber of national security – have persisted well into the present day, as have the rock festival's contrary rhetorical appeals of expensive discomfort and elegiac emotional release. Both are specious.

41 In this chapter I have shown how two films re-imagined rock festivals as a powerfully enticing new crowd formation and then disseminated that vision. I argue that by so

doing, they allowed concert-goers to feel as if they were participating in civic discourse while in fact they were doing nothing of the sort. Today's rock festivals, which explicitly relate themselves to these early sites, also situate themselves as discursive sites of political and social meaning-making, but, as was the case at Woodstock and Altamont, the meanings that they are making are not the same ones that they say they are. Instead, I would like to suggest that these festivals may also serve to make visible the new market economies of late capitalism (for example social networking), allowing a space for citizens to understand the shifting ways that post-industrial society might be used to their own advantage.

42 In his book *Worlds Apart*, Jean Christophe Agnew has suggested that Elizabethan theatre helped make the emerging market relations of nascent capitalism visible to play-goers. Both *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* reveal a new way of viewing democracy, such that the pursuit of pleasure, in the form of music, drugs and sexuality, becomes political and hence almost a moral imperative. At the same time, the films also suggest a new relationship between consumers (concert-goers) and vendors, artisans and musicians which allows the market economy to seem moral. This is a relationship that has been upheld on the festival grounds the world over.[11]

43 Finally, both films reveal to viewers a reshaped idea of the commodity as something not necessarily material, but something intangible – an aura, a feeling, 'an experience'; all the trademarks of late capitalism. In these films, celebrity, experience and presence are seen to be more valuable than commodities. The mental transformation that these depictions allow for – the transformation of the free market into a supposedly moral space and of the commodity into something more invisible – may go a long way toward explaining the disjunction between rhetoric and reality that haunts the rock festival grounds today.

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NOTES

1. The damage caused the cancelation of that week's Natalie Cole concert.

2. The difference between a festival and a concert is difficult to define, but if a concert is described as the performance of a single act, though perhaps augmented by a lesser-known opening act, then Altamont – a singular event of its kind – was probably closer in spirit to a festival. Although the only known poster for the event calls it a 'free concert', it was promoted elsewhere in everything written about it as 'The Altamont Raceway Free Festival', and featured performances by Santana, Crosby, Stills and Nash, the Flying Burrito Brothers, Jefferson Airplane, all of whom were nationally acclaimed acts in their own right (the Grateful Dead were also scheduled to perform, but left the site due to the violence). The poster, which now sells for $5,000 on e-bay, must have been printed up in the 24 hours after the venue was changed from Sear's Point, and, previously, Golden Gate Park. It is not, in other words, an official document.

3. The yearly Roskilde Music Festival, in Denmark, routinely draws 160,000 people per day. Hardly Strictly Bluegrass, held in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park each autumn, draws 750,000 across three days. These are just a small sample of audiences.

4. This is particularly true today, when what promoters call 'destination festivals' occur in tourist Meccas like Rio and Sydney, inviting urban enclaves like Austin and Chicago, or, most tempting of all, out of the way destinations. In 2011, Iggy Pop headlined a festival in Corsica, and plans are currently underway for a rock festival in China for 2013.

5. The film *Glastonbury Fayre*, directed by Nicolas Roeg (1972), documents the 1971 Glastonbury festival. As that festival follows the wide release of *Woodstock*, it would provide an excellent counterpoint as to how the films *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter* may have shaped future festivals – and future films on festivals – rhetoric. Unfortunately it is outside the scope of this chapter.

6. Due to ownership disputes, the film *Message to Love* wasn't released until 1996, thus placing it outside the lens of this chapter.
7. This can only have been seen as an incentive for future festival promoters: today, many enormous rock festivals are sponsored by communications companies, whose financial backing keeps consumer costs relatively low while boosting sales of synchronous markets in film, music and beer sales.
8. That would be the year I attended my first Day on the Green, a mid-decade iteration of Woodstock held in American football stadiums nationwide. It featured the Beach Boys, Linda Ronstadt and Eddie Money.
9. For an excellent overview of how this occurs, see Dave Saunders, *Direct Cinema: Observational Documentary and the Politics of the Sixties* (2007).
10. The sequence echoes *Woodstock*, but can not be influenced by it: these two films were in production at the same time.
11. Elsewhere in my work, I explore a 1983 festival sponsored by Apple cofounder Steven Wozniak which showcased the relationship between computer technology and music 20 years before the invention of the iPod.

ABSTRACTS

This essay suggests that the longstanding idea of free rock festivals as a site of transgression and social transformation is based on the successful rhetorics circulated by the two famed films of each, *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace & Music,* and *Gimme Shelter*. I argue that both films worked as cultural, rather than countercultural, propaganda, tacitly substantiating Cold War claims in a time of civic unrest, in part by making economic changes from industrial to post industrial forms both visible and appealing. In it, I discuss how the visual rhetoric of rock festivals evolved via a rhetorical analysis of the films *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter*, focusing on each film's insistent narratives about nature, capitalism, rural America, art and freedom. It is my contention there that the effect of these two films, both released in 1970, on future rock festivals cannot be underestimated. Between the two of them, one can account for the highly contradictory beliefs and actions of rock fans at present day concerts where discourses about free love and the emancipatory nature of drug use have degenerated into discourses about female nudity and drug use that have nothing to do with emancipation. The narratives embedded in both *Woodstock and Gimme Shelter* explain how these ideas have come to be circulated with such effectiveness. They may even explain the continued appeal of the outdoor rock festival today.

L'idée selon laquelle les festivals de rock furent des sites de transgression et de transformation sociale provient des discours tenus par deux films fameux, *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace & Music* et *Gimme Shelter*. Je soutiens que ces deux films ont fait œuvre de propagande bien plus que de contre-culture, offrant tacitement de la substance aux définitions dominantes de l'époque, héritées du climat de Guerre froide, comme celle d'une révolte civique, en rendant en partie les transformations économiques en cours (le passage à une économie post-industrielle) à la fois visibles et attrayantes. J'analyse la rhétorique visuelle de ces deux films, en me concentrant sur leurs récits sur la nature, le capitalisme, l'Amérique rurale, l'art et la liberté. L'effet de ces deux films sortis en 1970 sur les festivals de rock à venir ne peut être sous-estimé. Ils nourrirent les contradictions des croyances et actions des fans de rock aux concerts actuels : les discours

d’origine sur l’amour libre et l’expérience libératrice de la prise de drogues ont dégénéré en des formes qui n’ont rien à voir avec l’émancipation.

INDEX

Mots-clés: authenticité, drogues / alcool, cinéma, jeunes / jeunesse, discours, concert / live / festival, Woodstock / Altamont / Wight, représentation (visuelle), mainstream / commerce / marchandisation, hippies / freaks, violence
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nomsmotscles Brautigan (Richard), Dylan (Bob), Crosby Stills & Nash (& Young), Rolling Stones (the), Havens (Richie), Santana
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AUTHOR

REGINA ARNOLD

Gina ARNOLD received her Ph.D. in Stanford's program of Modern Thought & Literature in June 2011. She is the author of two books, *Route 666: On the Road To Nirvana*, (St. Martin's Press/Picador UK 1993) and *Kiss This: Punk in the Present Tense* (St. Martin's Press/Picador UK, 1997). Her contribution to the 33 1/3rd series *Exile In Guyville* (Bloomsbury Press) is forthcoming.